

Horry County Diners Breathe Easier Thanks to Coalition's Work

Issue

After N.Y. tourist Joe Johnson visited Myrtle Beach in March 2005, he wrote a letter to the editor of local paper *The Sun News* about the need for smoke free restaurants in South Carolina. Visitors from the Northeast, which flock to the state's Grand Strand area each year, are used to smoke free indoor environments. For Myrtle Beach "...It only makes sense to go smoke-free and fast," he wrote

Public opinion in South Carolina also suggests the need for stronger clean indoor air, but the legacy of tobacco is strong in Horry County as many residents have ties to the farming industry.

- Horry County ranks No. 4 nationally and No.1 in South Carolina in tobacco production with approximately 16 million pounds of tobacco produced in 2002.
- There are more than 270 tobacco farms in the county totaling more than 7,600 acres (2002 Agriculture Census).

While the area has realized economic gain from Horry County's prolific crop, individuals and communities incur health and cost burdens from tobacco use. Between 1998 and 2003, Horry County experienced 2,650 cancer deaths, and more than 850 of those were lung/bronchus cancer, of which 85% can be attributed to tobacco use. Health care costs directly caused by smoking annually top \$1 billion in South Carolina. This figure does not include additional health costs from exposure to secondhand smoke and extra cleaning and maintenance costs businesses incur. Such expenses to commercial establishments alone top \$4 billion annually nationwide.

Intervention

To combat the dangerous consequences of secondhand smoke in public places, the B.R.E.A.T.H.E. Tobacco Prevention Coalition of Horry County in 2005 began advocating for smoke free dining establishments. Thanks to Block Grant money, which funded 15 percent of the project, the coalition surveyed local restaurants on their tobacco use policies and offered resources for those restaurants indicating an interest in going smoke free.

Some of the efforts thus far have included:

- Developing a database of all dining establishments in Horry County and gathering information on their smoking policies;
- Updating a brochure to publicize the growing number of smoke free restaurants. The brochures are available at local chambers of commerce and visitors centers; and
- Awarding smoke free restaurants certificates of commendation.

Impact

Since this initiative began, businesses have attracted new customers, who want their families to dine in pleasant, healthy smoke free facilities. Thanks to the BREATHE Coalition's work:

- Chain restaurants such as KFC, Bojangles, Pizza Hut, Golden Corral and Chick-fil-A now have smoke-free policies; and
- Several locally-owned restaurants such as California Pizza and The Trestle Bakery Cafe also have become smoke free.

According to Jim Cutter, owner of the Golden Corral in Myrtle Beach, "Four-hundred to 500 customers have expressed true appreciation of the smoke free environment."

Contact: 2830 Oak Street
Larry A. White Conway, SC 29528
Chronic Disease Manager 843-365-3126
Region 6, SCDHEC whitela@dhec.sc.gov